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PROGRAMME PLANNING: COUNTRY AND INTERCOUNTRY PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

Human Reproductive Health (GLO/92/003)

Recommendation of the Administrator

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| Estimated contribution of UNDP: | $1,000,000 |
| Duration: | Four years |
| Executing agency: | World Health Organization (WHO) |

## I. BACKGROUND

1. Reproductive health means that sex, pregnancy and birth can take place in a state of physical, mental and social well-being. Human suffering related to reproduction is widespread. About 500 million couples and countless individuals have no access to effective and acceptable methods of fertility regulation. Each year, about half a million women die of pregnancy-related complications and around 15 times that number suffer life-long disabilities. An estimated 30 to 50 million women undergo induced abortions each year and perhaps as many as 200,000 women die from the consequences of unsafely performed abortions. In addition, 250 million cases of sexually transmitted diseases occur each year, and an estimated 1 in 250 adults world wide are infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Overwhelmingly, this suffering occurs under conditions of extreme poverty in developing countries.

2. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that, by the year 2020, the world's population will exceed 8,000 million people - double what it was in 1976. Almost all this increase is occurring in developing countries where population growth is seriously affecting people's ability to improve the quality of their lives. The improvement of reproductive health is critical to improving the situation.

3. The Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction exists to help meet this challenge. It was established in 1972 by the World Health Organization (WHO) and initially funded by a small group of countries. Since 1988, it has been co-sponsored by UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), WHO, and the World Bank.

4. The programme is a global partnership of scientists and scientific institutions in more than 80 countries. The programme promotes, coordinates, supports, conducts, and evaluates research in human reproduction, with special reference to the needs of developing countries, The programme also works to develop and strengthen the reproductive health research capabilities of developing countries. A comprehensive package which includes research support, human resources development, research training, workshops, technical advice and assistance, and statistics and data processing is being made available at the country level.

## II. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAMME

5. The programme is the main instrument in the United Nations system for research in human reproductive health. Its ultimate goal is to increase understanding of the human reproductive process leading to the development of a variety of safe, acceptable and effective fertility regulating methods with an emphasis on promoting better health and family planning practices. Special areas of focus include safety and efficiency, behavioural and social determinants, long-acting systemic methods, post-ovulatory methods, vaccines, male methods, natural methods and infertility.

6. The programme promotes scientific and technological advances in the field through its collaboration with other agencies. It facilitates collaboration with a wide variety of other programmes which also undertake research in human reproduction. These include agencies which support research in this field, such as UNFPA and programmes which actually conduct such work, e.g., the International Committee of Contraceptive Research of the Population Council, Family Health International, the Indian Council of Medical Research, and the United States National Institutes of Health.

7. Furthermore, the programme has developed working relations with the pharmaceutical industry in a variety of ways. Industry has provided compounds and devices for comparative trials, most often free-of-charge. Where products are not yet marketed, the programme has carried out a variety of clinical studies, thus significantly contributing to the early registration of the products. Finally, in certain instances the programme itself has been

responsible for initial research and development of a new method, and then has approached suitable industrial partners to share the product development costs. During the past 17 years, more than 60 drugs and devices have been made available to the programme for testing in clinical and preclinical studies from more than 40 companies from about 20 countries. Products developed by the programme are now being introduced in the family planning services in many countries (e.g. monthly injectable and vaginal ring contraceptives).

8. In recommending in 1988 that UNDP join the group of co-sponsors, the Administrator recognized the vital contribution of the programme to social and economic aspects of development programmes world wide. UNDP's involvement together with WHO, UNFPA, and the World Bank consolidates a unified multilateral effort. Only a globally coordinated effort can make the most effective use of scientific and economic resources, pinpointing areas of the greatest need and encouraging international scientific collaboration. In influencing the future evolution of the programme, UNDP will draw on its experience in managing and coordinating development for the promotion of human development.

9. Despite an estimated 10-fold increase in the number of people using contraceptives during the past several decades and remarkable leaps in scientific knowledge, a great need for human reproduction research remains. To most effectively serve developing country needs, research in human reproduction must proceed along two lines: (a) mobilization of a global effort to develop and test new technologies and to improve the performance of existing technology; and (b) promotion and support of the research efforts of developing countries. Since reproductive health needs frequently differ from region to region and culture to culture, developing countries themselves must identify and prioritize their own specific needs. An essential component of the programme's mission, therefore, is to continue to strengthen and reinforce the research capabilities of developing countries, enabling them to improve the lives of their own people and to contribute to the world around them.

10. The overriding goal of the programme is to provide safe, affordable and effective products which can be used in community-based primary health care services. The results of this research programme therefore have an impact on the ability of national programmes to deliver affordable and sustainable community-based health services.

11. The programme establishes and upholds the highest external and scientific standards in reproductive health research. Research proposals are evaluated through a rigorous ethical review process involving investigators, host institutions, national authorities, several scientific and ethical review committees and WHO.

12. In 1989, external impact evaluation of the programme firmly endorsed these goals and strongly recommended the continuation of the programme within the United Nations system. It further urged sponsoring agencies and donors to increase the funding for the programme. A copy of the external evaluation is available upon request.

13. The programme is co-sponsored by UNDP, UNFPA, WHO and the World Bank. The executing agency is WHO. The research and development activities are directed by multidisciplinary, multinational scientific task forces, and implemented through a world-wide network of collaborating centres. The programme structure includes a Policy and Coordination Committee (PCC) of 32 members which comprises government representatives, co-sponsors and contributors. A Scientific and Technical Advisory Group (STAG) consisting of scientists from both developing and developed countries reviews, from a scientific and technical standpoint, the content, scope and dimensions of the programme.

14. The programme interacts closely with a number of other UNDP-supported health initiatives including the WHO/UNDP Vaccine Development Programme (PVD), the WHO/UNDP/World Bank Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR), and the Global Programme on AIDS (GPA).

15. The proposed UNDP contribution is $1 million over four years. The total annual contribution from other donors is approximately $30 million. The UNDP contribution will be used for subcontracts to international and national research institutes and public and private sector companies.

## III. RECOMMENDATION BY THE ADMINISTRATOR

16. The Administrator recommends that the Governing Council approve this project.

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